WORD
LETTER
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Wordeater

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True Friendship

Amanda Codini

Why have all my closest friends become pregnant? We are still only nineteen years old. Most of my friends are all married too. Why? Can I just ask that?

Three best friends. All who have been friends since grade school. Everything that was going on during our generation we've pretty much avoided. Things like alcohol, drugs, cigarettes—and here's the biggie—pregnancy. There was no way that a boy was ever going to change our minds about sex. Our minds were set. We would never have sex until we were married, if ever. We knew the facts. The diseases we could get, the pain we would go through if we did have sex. No way. Sex was not an option for us. It was the farthest thing from our minds, and we would never let a boy get in the way of our friendship. So then what happened? The one thing we always feared turned out to be the one thing that's split us apart.

It's a very confusing story. A friendship that should never have ended but did, ended because of boys. Jackie Lasa, one of the girls who was one of my best friends, was the only girl I knew who was absolutely petrified of sex. She had dreams of becoming a hairstylist, along with my other best friend, Stacy Smith. Jackie and Stacy would always be the ones to volunteer to do someone's hair when it came close to prom, or homecoming, or any event that was about to happen. Hell, it didn't even have to be an event, and they would be nagging people to do their hair. Well, while they were running around playing with hair, I was too busy watching television, hoping to be the next Lucille Ball. Taking notes on just about everything she did, memorizing lines from *I Love Lucy* episodes, Buying all the shirts, pictures, jewelry. that I could find. Yep, that was me, Jessica Dini. While people were out trying to do something with their lives, I found sitting close to the TV the only thing worth doing. Of course, I got over it, sort of.

Anyways, the three of us were inseparable. Towards the end of our high school life, we found ourselves dating. Jackie and I had our fair share of boys. Stacy, on the other hand, well, she was having some problems, but still we were the best of friends. No jealousy, no problems, no nothing. One day Jackie met Kevin. We were all introduced to him. Kevin was kind of weird in the sense that he always wore the same clothes, but, hey, he was Jackie's man, not ours. So Jackie started to spend just a little more time with Kevin, not to the point where we were going to say something, but to the point where we noticed. After a while, Jackie would come around Stacy's and my house with him. Ok, fine. I guess that

was okay, to a certain extent. I just didn't need to see Kevin as often as Jackie did. So after a while, Stacy and I saw more of each other without Jackie. We were getting kind of sick of Kevin. It wouldn't be too long after that I would end up seeing someone too. His name was Daryl. He was nice, sweet, and funny; he got along with my friends. So it was okay. Naturally, after a while Stacy started to get mad because Jackie and I were always out with boyfriends. Most of the time it was jealously, but we understood. We would be pissed off too if we didn't have someone to call and hangout with all the time. So we gave our men a break, to hangout with each other again. Jackie and Kevin were on the rocks. Kevin did something to piss off Jackie and Kevin didn't care, blah, blah, blah. Basically saying that they were about to break up, and what do you know? They did. Kevin got back together with his old girlfriend, and Jackie basically called Stacy and me every night crying. We were there for her, we listened to all the "I loved him's" and all the "I hate him's." Basically what everyone hears after someone breaks up. So we gave her hugs and we watched the two of them become psycho. Oh yeah, psycho. Jackie decided it would be cool if she planted drugs in his car to get him kicked out of school, not to mention arrested. When Kevin got out of jail, he would do doughnuts in her yard over and over again. Yes, things were looking up for Jackie. Stacy, on the other hand, was becoming more bitchy to me because of Daryl. I admit it; I was starting to like him more and more every day. Obviously, I wasn't living up to Stacy's expectations. So, whatever. A couple of months went by. I was still with Daryl, and Stacy was still pissed off about how boys were an issue all the time, and Jackie and Kevin were still at each other's throats. Things calmed down a little though.

I thought it was time to get a new job. At the time, I was working at McDonald's. God, it was great. Not. Anyway, I went in for an interview for a secretary job, and who else was there, but Kevin. "Oh," I said. "Hi." Then he sat by me, unfortunately. We talked. He asked how Jackie was and if I still talked to her. I said she was fine and yes, I still talked to her. Basically, he kept asking me bullshit like that. Then he made a comment I will never forget. He said, "I bet you any amount of money that I can get her back again." I looked at him in disgust, thinking to myself, why would you want to? After making each other's lives miserable for so many months, why? I kept my mouth shut though and just said, "Ya, you probably could, but don't try because I'd have to kill you." I remember him laughing like I was joking. The funny thing was, I wasn't.

So we're all still friends. It's great. Never been happier. Daryl was still part of my life, but I didn't let it affect my friendship with the girls. One day, Stacy and I were just sitting around watching television. The phone rang. It was Jackie. After

talking to her on the phone for three hours, all she basically had to say was that she and Kevin were back together. Oh that didn't go well with Stacy and me. We were pissed off. But that was only day one. Day two, I get another call. "Me and Kevin had sex." Holy cow! I couldn't believe it... Miss virgin Jackie had sex? Miss "I will never have sex because it will hurt" had sex? What was she thinking? Oh, but there was more. Day three, Stacy gets a call. "Guess what, Stacy? I think I'm pregnant." That was it. Stacy and I were close to killing Jackie, but we managed to stay by Jackie's side. We all went out for a wonderful evening of "find a pregnancy test for Jackie." It was great. No, not really. Anyway, day four arrives. We both get a call from Jackie. It's the grand finale. Jackie had eloped, moved in with Kevin on the day she found she was late with her period. Just what we wanted to hear. So basically, as everyone knew was going to happen, she became pregnant. She tried to explain to us that she didn't know they weren't using a condom. She said it was wet, but Kevin told her it was from her orgasms. So the way I look at it is that Kevin got his way, and now Jackie's going to pay for it. I was beyond pissed off. I couldn't even talk to Jackie, and I pretty much stayed that way.

I never talked to Jackie again. After that, Stacy and I were friends for a while, and then she got sick of Daryl, and decided to dump me. So here I am. None of us talk anymore, nor have we seen each other for the longest time. All of my other friends, who I thought had their head out of their asses too, well, they all are either married, dead, or pregnant. We all basically went our own ways from there. I still hear bits and pieces about them. Not enough to make me want to call them though.

So that's my story about friendship and boys. I really do believe that boys always come between you and your friends. I just want to know why people who are nineteen years old believe getting pregnant and married is so important.

The Cry Of A Barren Woman

NG THESY I

O! Woman of isolation
Because of fruitless
Month-in-law nails
Sisters jeered, children cast stones
Brothers back and mock
I cried

Partner fled
To take transparent maids
At white house
Enjoy to the full
Without looking back
Even when back
Puts an owl face
I cried

Darl, give me a FAIR dice
My eggs aren't smashed
Won't you eat faith?
Pray and give me your MAN
And with your middle
I will take in
I cried

Halt with your curse
Check your palms
If it is written, it is written
If it is written no unwritten
My womb commits no crime
I cried

Face me! Face me!
O! I cried
YOU put me in my mother's
Give me or pluck my heart
Give me or lock my sight
Lock my sound or give it to me
I cried

Am I not pure before
He took my hands?
Am I not only on his sheet after?
O! I cried, give ear
Why the torments?
O virgins are also thus
I cried

Men

Lynn Maland

Why do men confuse us the way they do? How are they able to get inside of our heads and hearts and make us feel like princesses? To be able to know our dreams, fears, and what we long for in life? Yet at the first sign of trouble, they vanish into thin air. And the only thing that they leave us with is heartbreak, pain, and confusion.

There is a man in my life who is making me feel this way. I have liked him from the first moment I saw him almost two years ago. Whenever I'm around him, I feel nothing but pleasure. However, when he is nowhere to be found, I'm in agony. Always thinking that there could always be more for us. Still, I don't know what he feels. I wonder if he ever thinks of me the way I think of him.

Desire

Ibrahim Atac

I had a love once and shadow took her.
It was momentum, cubist abstracted her
when the wind bestowed into dimmed craving;
All that was sentimental, one once hoped for.

Delineation depicted her in the shadow of her pace.
Revelation of her image of the out-live was in her face.
The abyss was appearing when the dark night outburst;
Achievement of impossibility dispossessed light in her gaze.

Baggage

Marissa Frattini

The nights pass so slowly.
Nothing drowns out the noises, the screams, the anger...

No pills, no drink, no noise, no man.
I've made my bed (and unmade it for many a person, yes)
and I guess I must try to sleep in it.

But my dreams are disjointed and my breathing is now labored;
I feel lost and I fall often.
Things climb aboard my back,
dragging me back down into the depths of past mistakes.

Things never fade.
Regrets and shame only build and remain.
Baggage becomes so heavy—
too heavy for even myself and my therapist to carry.

"Why don't you open it and unpack a little? you say.

(Sigh)

Honey, there are things better left locked up.

My baggage is a country in itself—
a large third world country—
dirty and sad, terrifying and depressing at the very least;
packed tight, overflowing often,
a small, ragged suitcase whose corners are duct-taped,
whose latch is busted and sadly stapled,
whose pockets are paper clipped and safety pinned ten times over.
I sit here underneath it
crushed under the weight,
praying it won't bust open at an inopportune moment.

Love

Jesse Cohoon

Love is patient.
Patient beyond the span of a mortal man
Patient enough to wait for sex until marriage
Patient enough to raise a child with Down's syndrome
Patient enough to care for a sick mother dying from cancer

Love is kind.
Kind beyond normal moral kindness
Kind enough to always say "please" and "thank you"
Kind enough to always give comfort, a shoulder to cry on when needed
Kind enough to never judge on any basis

Love does not envy.
Total non-enviousness of anything beyond the capacities of human nature
Not envious enough to ever covet anything another has
Not envious enough to be jealous because it has the mindset that
"If you love something and let it go,
If it does not return to you, it never really was yours to begin with"

Love does not boast; it's not proud,
It does not boast about anything
Non-boastful about its sexual conquests
Non-boastful about its job
Non-boastful about its material possessions

Love is not self-seeking.
Love does not seek out other love
Love is content to stay alone because
Love knows that
Love will find a way

Love is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrong.
Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth
Love is slow to anger and once angered
Love wants to forgive and forget
Love avoids evil and lies, seeking to reveal the truth.

Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes always perseveres
Love protects what it loves
Love trusts what it loves
Love hopes for the best for what it loves
Love seeks to preserve love throughout all

Preacher's Kid

Kendra Svendsen

PK or preacher's kid, Miss Goodie Two-Shoes, a good girl, and any other cutesy, holier-than-thou nickname in the book is referred to me because I'm a minister's daughter. It makes me sick. I have this image, right? To be some perfect angel or something. I swear it's like they see the halo on my head. I mean he didn't become a minister until I was like ten. I wasn't born into this world as a saint. I'm expected to follow every rule and obey everything I'm told, or I won't set a good example. My mother always says that I have to set some bullshit example for other kids. She tells me that they will say that if it's okay for the minister's daughter to do, then it must be okay for them to do as well. She just doesn't get it. Kids are not like that with anyone, especially their friends. My friend Marcy got stoned because her friend Chris did, and that meant it was okay in her eyes. His dad is a used car salesman. So where does this leave me? Everything I do is not perfect enough for my family or the church, yet nothing I do is exciting enough for my peers or myself. I get stuck between that proverbial rock and a hard place continuously. The other day Stacy wanted me to share a beer that she was able to sneak from her dad in her clubhouse. One sip was all I took. It was so gross. I about puked all over, and she just looked at me like I was crazy. She said that I was such a Miss Priss. Whatever. She doesn't get it either. When you are used to having a sip of wine at church once a month, beer is dogshit in comparison. That, I guess, is one of the perks of church life. Even though we are Methodist and not Catholic, we drink wine at every communion instead of the usual grape juice. My dad says that it's more authentic that way. Jesus and his disciples drank it, and so should we. Bonus, I say! I love red wine. I look forward to every first Sunday of the month. Anyway, who cares about Stacy anyhow? She is just another one of those girls who mess with every boy to make herself popular. She does stuff that the other girls, well most of them anyhow, won't do. She is so nasty. She tells me all about the shit that she does and asks me when I'm going to lose my virginity. I said that I had no use for boys right now, and again with the "what the fuck is wrong with you" look. I think, though, that if this one boy that I like asked me to, I just might let him get somewhere. It's hard being the only girl who hasn't at least kissed a boy. Well, I kissed a boy once, but I never tell anyone about it. It was terrible. I asked my friend Tara how to French kiss, and she said that you simply stick your tongues in each other's mouth and move them around. It was a disaster. Saliva everywhere, and he hit his teeth against mine. That was the

summer between sixth and seventh grade. I'll be a freshman this fall, and I'm terrified about all the dances and dating. I just know that my dad will want to sit them down and talk to any guy that I attempt to date. Which won't end up being much because as soon as he starts into the sanctity of marriage speech, my date will go running for the hills. It's funny how my dad is so perfect now when he never was before. My dad was a pot-smoking, long-haired, Harley-Davidson-riding Navy man. He was this hard ass until I was born, I'm told. He tells me over and over and over and over and fucking over that he was so excited to be a father that he held me in his arms and thought of all the things that I would grow up to do and accomplish. I would go to school, dances, make friends, have talents, be brilliant, and someday marry a nice young man just like him. Which, at that point, made him go, "Shit, I don't want her to go anywhere near a man like me." And I assure you that that is exactly what his plan is—to alienate me from anyone like his former self and any other suitor, for that matter. My mom just wants me to marry a guy from the church. Great, just fucking great, I say. You'd understand what I mean if you went to my church. Slim pickings there, I tell you. I think they'd be happy if I became a nun or something. Well, no, probably not, because then I'd be Catholic and wouldn't go to their church. God forbid I do something out of sync with anything they do. I think someday I will show them and become a nun who marries a Harley man and rides off into the sunset drinking a beer on my way to join the Navy.

I went to church this morning and HOLY SHIT! A new guy in church. He wasn't wearing dress clothes either. A new family moved across the street and came to church with their son and daughter. They looked all kinds of pissed off and just sat there glum faced during the service. I'm brimming with excitement. Forget the other guy I liked because this guy is beyond hot. Bright blue eyes, dark shaggy hair, and a baby face connected to one hell of a body. Maybe it's the fact that he's exactly what my parents don't want for me, or maybe it's just because he's fucking hot! Man, I haven't felt like this before. If I get a chance with this guy, I'm taking it. I don't care what my folks think. I can't wait until next Sunday now.

O man, was this Sunday cool! That guy's name is Derrick. I was helping with the setup for communion, and I saw him come in the door and walk past the kitchen. I took the biggest step that I've ever dared to take and actually made the first move and asked him if he wanted a pre-communion sample. We drank some and got talking. I sat with him in church and watched my mom fume over in the

first pew. She kept turning and looking back all nonchalant trying to see what we were doing. The nice thing about helping with communion is that she sits first, and I come in later with the stuff, and then I get to sit. Thusly sitting wherever I choose. Unless, that is, she wants to make a huge scene and drag me to the front pew. We must keep up appearances. I mean, what would the fellow churchgoers think, right? We can't have that. We were the only ones in the back pew because it's like half the size of the others, and he put his hand on my knee. I thought I was going to kiss him right there during church. I got all warm and tingly inside. After church, we went to the park, and I got my first real kiss. This time no aching teeth or saliva dripping down my chin. It was magic. We kissed for what seemed like hours, and I let him put his hand up my shirt. It was so scary. Scary and wonderful all at the same time. When I went home, I lied to my parents about where I was and who I was with. This was like the first time for that because I never really had anything to cover up. It was kind of exhilarating. I'm going to keep seeing Derrick even if they don't want me too. It's so cool that I have someone exciting to hang around with instead of stupid Marcy who only talks about pot. Yeah, something that makes you tired, dehydrated, and stupid—give me some of that. All she does is sit around and get stoned and eat. She's going to have no brain cells left by the time she graduates. If she graduates that is. Plus, she will weigh like three hundred pounds because of constant munchies. I'll stick to my wine tasting and playground fooling around, thank you. Next fall doesn't seem so scary all of a sudden. Derrick has shown me that I can handle boys, and, besides, don't they say that minister's daughters are always the worst ones?

The Truth

Ryan Ruffatti

A man walks his dog.
No one cares.
A man finds the answer.
No one cares.
A student falls behind.
No one cares.
A star gets arrested.
The world pays attention.

A good deed is done.
No one cares.
An old lady is walked across the street.
No one cares.
A life is saved.
No one cares
A celebrity gets a hangnail.
Front page news.

A job is done.
No one cares.
A book is published.
No one cares.
Someone writes a piece of art.
No one cares.
Someone famous writes a hack story.
The celebration begins.

A boy is sick.
No one cares.
An infinite amount of viruses invade the body.
No one cares.
Cancer takes another life.
No one cares.
An actor sneezes.
The world prays.

The Thinker

Joe Jensen

Monday 3:00 a.m.

I do not know what is wrong with me. I think I am sick. Today I stared at the little wall in my kitchen for hours. I was caught in deep thought. It was like a dream. I know I was on the verge of something big. Something immaculate. Suddenly I became aware that I was staring at the wall. I lost everything I was thinking. I only know it was important and profound. Just like in a dream, these feelings were only shadows. Maybe my mind had shut itself off. Maybe I only think that I was having these pure thoughts, but they seem so tangible. I have the feeling. A strong feeling. There are always feelings behind dreams. Once I had a dream about shopping. I was in the grocery store and my guts were pouring onto the floor. No matter how hard I tried, I could not collect them all. And I had to buy sardines and fruit snacks. And my insurance agent was watching me and shaking his head and asking me questions that I could not understand. It was icky. I woke up crying and gasping for breath. It wasn't until I got into the shower that I realized what was really bothering me about the dream. I was confused and embarrassed! Not because I felt like a fool or ashamed that I had lost my guts in public. No, because behind it all, behind the grocery store and the guts and my insurance agent and the onlookers and the confusion, there was a feeling much more unnerving still. Behind it all was the feeling of having sex with my ex-wife. That slow, boring, dragging, monotonous, dead sex! That's what confused me. That is what threw me. More confusing was the feeling behind my lost daydream in the kitchen. This feeling was and is still unidentifiable. I am sure with some sleep I can eventually locate its origins.

Monday 4:30 a.m.

I cannot sleep. I cannot sleep. I feel faint and tired—almost too tired to write. So tired, but cannot sleep. I cannot get the thoughts out of my head. Strange thoughts. Round, round like a wheel turning. This and that, then this again. Round, round like a wheel. I see static in the darkness. For me, there is no black. It is all optical noise. I see noise. Soft fluffs of noise. It flitters about. It becomes things. My mind blazes through the darkness. My mind sees more than I thought my brain ever knew. Tired. Can't

Monday 6:07 a.m.

It happened again. The thinking thing again. Today when I came to, I found myself at my kitchen table. I was holding my spoon in my right hand posed pointing toward my cereal. The bowl was full, but everything had become a thick mushy mess. I missed work. I think I was eating breakfast when the thoughts overtook my mind. I must have sat there all day! What is wrong with me? I think I am sick or something. After I finished cleaning my dishes, I checked my answering machine. There were five calls, all from work. My partner was frantic. This, in particular, is most frustrating. How I am so immersed in thinking that I didn't hear the phone ring? Five times!

Again had that odd feeling. Ominous. Imposing. It's something big. It's thick. I can smell it. I can feel it. It is so familiar, yet so distant. It's eating away at me. It's eating my life.

I called my partner. He said we have a deadline in two weeks. He was worried that the writing will not be done. I know it won't, but I told him not to worry. I also told him that I was going to see a doctor tomorrow and not to expect me.

Tuesday 9:46 p.m.

I had another episode today. I decided to refer to my mental attacks as "episodes" after my doctor used the term. It happened at the doctor's office this time. I was unresponsive for four hours. They had to hospitalize me. I came to in my hospital room. The doctor told me not to go to work for a week or so. He decided to keep me under observation for the night. I dislike hospitals. They are so impersonal. I feel so naked. I don't like my nurses, but I feel comforted by the fact that I am in a safe place.

This episode was no different. The thoughts have gone, but the feeling remains. Today, it seemed to be more solid. Something substantial was left this time. I have something to chew on. Strawberry red hair. That's it. Red hair in my hands. A woman's hair.

Wednesday 11:15 p.m.

Something most incredible happened to me today. It was during an episode at the mall. I was sitting in the food court having lunch when I blinked out. When I came to, I was looking into a small black boy's face. I asked what he was doing.

He told me that he was watching me. I asked him why, and his reply was the most intriguing thing I think I have ever heard in my life. We sat there, and he began to tell me a story. He told me about a woman with beautiful red hair and soft white skin. As the words flowed from his mouth, the world seemed to float by. Drifting. The slow, gentle bobs of heads in a crowd. The sensation not unlike being cradled. Everything moved slowly and sluggishly. As objects and people moved from one point in space to another, they became smeary and streaked by ribbons of color left behind them like tails of a kite. The boy's voice droned on and on and on. His words became obscure and tilted. That's the only way I can explain them. I was aware of the fact that they were words, and I knew that they all had meaning somewhere; they were coming at me, but they made no sense that I could tell. They were just smearing in the air as they left his mouth. The only thing that was clear was his face. Actually, it was too clear. It was bright and the high parts were filled with an eerie glow from a light which I could not see. As I stared into his face and listened to his gargling warble talk, the glow of his face became puffy with light. The glowing high points of his face were overtaking his appearance to the point where he looked chubby and bloated. Everything seemed to buzz and whirl around my head. Then I had a sinking feeling in my gut. A feeling of impending doom. I began to shake uncontrollably. I mean really shake. Every part of my body was vibrating so fast and hard that I thought that I was convulsing. I was freaking out now. I began pawing my neck and gasping for air. For some reason, I couldn't breathe. All along, the boy's voice droned like a freight train in my head.

It was then, on the verge of losing it, that I realized something odd. I had fallen from my seat to the floor. I was under the table. My hands were searching. Probing the ground. Reaching out. Extending into infinity. Then I realized that my arm was transparent. I mean, it was there, but it wasn't at the same time. My arm was still vibrating violently, but I realized something about my vibrations. My arm was only vibrating within the boundaries of my own arm. My arm wasn't shaking naturally. I was becoming super-sensitive. I was actually experiencing my own atomic structuring. Yes. I'd been vibrating my whole life. Ever since my conception.

I came to the understanding, and I mean that at that time I really knew firsthand, that I was nothing. I saw it. I was just spinning atoms. I was nothing except the spinning atoms. My body was just a mass of super fast partials. It was then that I also became aware of the world around me. I stood up and looked at the boy. He was still fixed on my old position in space–still droning on. Except

now the world was super clear. Crystal. And now the boy was fuzzy and streaked and sounded as though all his sentences were jammed together.

My eyes scanned my surroundings. Everything was vibrating just like me. Everything. Even the air shook with a nervous tension. The people in the food court were all walking around completely unaware of the world in which they were living. As they talked, I could see their voices vibrating air. As people walked by, I saw their hearts beating through their skin. It was like a world of walking anatomy models. I could even see the blood pumping through their veins, their skeletons and muscles moving, even the impulses traveling from their nerves to their brains and back again. It was intense. Really intense.

Of course, there was a definite structure to all this. I couldn't see it all at the same time. Everything was moving in stages, like layers being peeled away. I found that I could control it to a certain extent, but, overall, I just had to go with the flow of input.

Eventually, I tried to function like a normal person. I reached down and picked up my sandwich and took a bite. At first, the sensation was overwhelming: I could feel every bit of food touching every little bit of my mouth. I ate for a few minutes until I was struck with a sudden bit of mental awareness. I looked at the boy who had still not stopped talking. Suddenly everything he said became very clear. "Did your wife ever say she was sorry?" The words came so suddenly and so clearly that I was taken aback. I told him I didn't have a wife, but, as the words fell from my lips, something caught my eye. Actually, it was someone. A young red-haired woman approaching from behind the child. She was thin and built. She moved cat-like in an almost prowling fashion. Everything about her attracted me. I found myself slipping away. I was becoming numb and cold. I realized I was not vibrating anymore. Nothing was. The world was absolutely still. She stepped to the table and sat where the boy was sitting.

The world was normal now. Looking me in the eye, she took my hand from across the table. "I'm sorry, Honey. I really am." I believed her. I really did. I don't know why.

Suddenly, there was a brief, static darkness, and then I came to in the food court. The girl was gone. I cracked through the blockage in my head.

Nostalgia

Oksana Alfredson

What is the strange disease nostalgia? Everybody who leaves his or her country inevitably has its painful symptoms. For me, it began unexpectedly. My airplane started its long way from Kiev to Chicago. When the panorama of my city diminished and then disappeared, I felt the tears steaming down my face. I have always considered myself more practical than emotional. These tears surprised me. At that moment, I didn't realize that the virus of nostalgia had penetrated my blood.

What do I feel? I'm happy and satisfied here in another country. I have new experiences, new impressions, new friends. I visit new interesting places, I try new activities, and I enjoy speaking another language. But...I'm still at home in my native city. I live as if in two spaces simultaneously. I can be busy or free, do shopping or housekeeping, play bingo or have a romantic candlelight dinner with my husband, but, at the same time, the pictures of my previous life, my mother's face, images of my friends, and Kiev's streets appear in my mind like movie fragments. In my dreams, I walk through Kiev's parks and alleys, run through long corridors of my studio, or simply wait for the crowded bus in rush hour.

It is difficult to express how I miss the spring slush, the autumn carpet of leaves, the summer dust and winter slipperiness of Kiev's streets. The taste of bread is different. It is not worse. It is not better. It is different. Even the smell of the air is different. I'm infected with nostalgia; I know this. During this disease, all years of your previous life and everything that you loved or hated contract exactly to the size of your heart and fill it completely. The volume is small, but the mass is tremendous. It has sharp corners that hurt you whenever you turn your mind toward your home. "Your home is here," my husband says. Probably, it is. But if my home is here, where now is my heart?

Arroz Blanco con Manteca

Berta Isabel Arias

No hay nada más rico que el arroz blanco de mi abuela.

La miro en su va y ven por su cocina, repitiendo una vez más el rito de enseñarle a su nieta mayor el secreto de su arroz blanco.

Anticipo todos sus pasos – este momento ha ocurrido antes por lo menos media docena de veces. Y recuerdo muchos años atrás cuando recién casada pedí esta lección por primera vez.

La veo en aquel entonces. La ligereza de mi abuela desmentía sus 60 años. Su delgado y pequeño cuerpo se movía sin cesar, primero tomando la olla para el arroz de un estante elevado encima del fregadero, después cogiendo el saco de arroz de grano largo de otro lugar. Y recuerdo sus instrucciones:

"Mi nieta, no tiene ciencia hacer este arroz. Lo importante es usar arroz de grano largo. Y lavarlo muy bien, Después le pones agua, un poco de sal y aceite, y ya. Esperas a que se seque."

"¡No puede ser tan fácil!" me defendí yo. "A mí no me sale igual. Te voy a mirar cada paso."

"Ah, pues, bien. Pero acuérdate que yo no mido nada. Echo por ojo."

"Y, ¿cómo sabes cuánta agua ponerle?"

"Pues, yo siempre le pongo tres dedos de agua."

"¿Qué viene siendo eso?"

"Ven para acá." Obedecí.

"Ves. Ya tienes el arroz limpio. Echas agua hasta que se cubra el arroz con tres dedos" dijo juntando los tres dedos de la mano y midiendo el costado interior de la olla, "y ya."

"Me parece fácil."

"Sí lo es. Ahora le ponemos un poco de sal..." llenó la palma de la mano con una cantidad de sal que yo consideré enorme." ...un chorrito de aceite español..." (el chorrito sí me pareció 'un chorrito') – "... y lo pones a fuego mediano."

"¿ Es todo?"

"Sí. Es muy fácil, mi nieta."

"Yo no comprendo. Yo lo preparo así. Bueno, con menos sal. Pero mi arroz no sabe como el tuyo."

"Pues yo no sé por qué. Bueno, deja eso. Ven y siéntate conmigo. Cuéntame de ti mientras se seca el arroz."

¡Y cuántos cuentos no le he contado a mi abuela esperando a que se secara el arroz! Cuentos de recién casada, de estudiante universitaria, de gitana del mundo, de profesional, de madre de bebés y madre de mujeres jóvenes, de bodas, divorcios y muertes, de desencantos y felicidades.

Y siempre mis cuentos atendidos con su completa atención, con su amor puro de abuela, guiando e instruyendo sin yo saberlo.

¡Sabe Dios cuál fue el tema de aquella primera lección de hacer arroz blanco! No es importante.

"Ah, mira. Ya se secó el arroz," dijo al rato, levantándose enérgicamente.

"Ahora le ponemos un poquito de manteca..."

¡Manteca! ¿Qué manteca?

"Esto le da saborcito," decía mientras bajaba la más enorme lata de manteca Crisco que jamás había visto."

"Sí. Un poquito de manteca le da sabor." Y con esto mi abuela tomó un cucharón sopero repleto de manteca y lo dejó caer sobre el arroz blanco.

Sentí un escalofrío por todo el cuerpo. ¡Así que éste era el ingrediente secreto! Nunca había visto tanta manteca blanca. Y en ese momento, conciente no de razones de salud sino de una figura esbelta, vi derretirse el Crisco y engordar mis caderas.

"Ya está."

Tomó dos pozolitos y los llenó con arroz.

"¡A probar!" Paradas junto al mostrador de la cocina, el arroz blanco con manteca se derritió en mi boca. ¡Qué delicia!

¡Y qué sonrisa de orgullo de mi abuela!

* * * * *

Ahora la veo agachar la cabellera blanca para ver mejor la olla donde tiene el arroz bajo la pila de agua.

"Recuerda de lavarlo hasta que escurra el agua clarita, clarita." Asiento con la cabeza, rechazando el impulso de decir que se han escurrido también muchos nutrimentos. Esta es la receta de mi abuela.

"Pero, tú no cocinas mucho, ¿verdad?" me pregunta poniendo la olla dentro del recipiente eléctrico donde se cocinará el arroz automáticamente.

"No. Pero cuando haga arroz, quiero hacerlo como tú."

De sus labios no salen las preguntas que otros harían: "Pero profesora que eres, ¿no has aprendido después de tantas otras veces?" O "Si te gusta tanto este arroz, ¿cómo es que todavía no lo has hecho en estos 30 años?"

Disfruta de mi compañía y yo de la suya.

Nos sentamos a esperar a que se seque el arroz.

"Cuéntame de ti, Mima Otra. ¿Qué está pasando por aquí?"

"Ay, mi nieta..." comienza una larga conversación de mil y una preocupaciones, mil y una alegrías, mil y un recuerdos.

Soy yo la que alienta y apoya ahora, la que halaga su vida de 93 años. Me quiero llenar de ella.

Al rato le recuerdo que el arroz ya está seco, y con dificultad se levanta de la silla de la cocina. Le alcanzo el bastón comprado en los últimos meses.

"Ave María," me regaña con una sonrisa. "No lo necesito para dar tres pasos."

"Con tu problema en el tobillo, es bueno que te acostumbres a usarlo."

Me complace y toma el bastón. Sé que será desdeñado cuando me vaya.

"Y ahora un poquito de manteca..."

Suspiro, rezando que yo tenga los genes de colesterol de mi abuela.

"Esto le da saborcito."

Le alcanzo los dos pozolitos para hacer nuestra prueba. Esta vez nos sentamos a la mesa para probar lo que ya sabemos no tiene comparación alguna.

"¡Qué rico, Mima Otra!"

"Sí que todavía puedo hacer buen arroz, ¿verdad?" me sonríe en voz baja.

"¡El mejor del mundo!"

Y entre risas y conversaciones, en su pequeña cocina bañada en la claridad de la mañana, le pido a Dios que me dé la oportunidad de aprender a hacer arroz blanco con manteca otra vez, otro día, con mi abuela.

White Rice with Lard

Berta Isabel Arias, translated by the author

There is nothing more delicious than my grandmother's white rice.

I watch her as she comes and goes in her kitchen, repeating one more time the ritual of teaching her oldest granddaughter the secret of her white rice.

I anticipate her every move–this has occured before at least half a dozen times. And I remember the first time many years ago when, as a young newlywed, I asked to have this lesson with my grandmother.

I can see her clearly then. Her lightness and agility belied her sixty years. Her thin and small body darted here and there, first taking the pot for the rice from a shelf over the sink, then grabbing the sack of rice from another spot. And I remember her instructions:

"Mi Nieta, there's nothing to making this rice. The important thing is to use long grain rice. And to rinse it very well. Afterwards, you add water, a little salt and oil, and that's it. You wait until it's cooked."

"It can't be that easy!" I defended myself. "It doesn't come out the same when I make it. I'm going to watch your every step."

"That's fine. But remember–I don't measure anything. I just add what I need to."

"And how do you know how much water to add?"

"Well, I always add three fingers' worth."

"What does that come to?"

"Come over here."

I obeyed.

"See? The rice is already rinsed. You add water until the rice is covered with three fingers," she said measuring the inside of the pot with her three middle fingers joined together. "That's it."

"It seems easy."

"Yes, it is. Now we add a little salt." She filled her palm with an enormous amount of salt. "A little olive oil." The olive oil seemed reasonable. "And you cook it at medium heat."

"That's all?"

"It's very easy, mi nieta."

"I don't understand. That's how I prepare it. Well, with less salt. But my rice doesn't taste like yours."

"Well, I don't know why. But leave that alone. Come and sit with me. Tell me what's going on with you while we wait for the rice to cook."

And how many stories I have told my grandmother waiting for the rice to cook! Stories of being a newlywed, a university student, a gypsy of the world, the mother of babies and the mother of young women, stories of weddings, of divorces and deaths, of disappointments and joys.

And always my stories listened to with complete attention, with her pure grandmother's love, guiding and teaching, without my knowing it.

God knows what our discussion was about at that first lesson in making white rice! It's not important.

"Oh look, the rice is cooked," she said after a while, getting up energetically. "Now we add a little lard."

"Lard! What lard?"

"This gives it saborcito," she said as I saw her lower the largest can of Crisco that I have ever seen.

"Yes. A little lard makes it taste good." And with that, my grandmother took a ladle full of lard and spread it over the rice.

I felt a chill through my body. So this was the secret ingredient! I had never seen so much white lard. And at that moment, conscious not of health reasons but of a thin figure, I saw the Crisco melt and my hips widen.

"It's ready." She took two small bowls and filled them with the rice.

"Now the taste test!" Standing together next to her kitchen counter, the white rice with lard melted in my mouth. How delicious!

And what a proud smile on my grandmother's face!

* * * * *

Now I watch her white head bent over, straining to better see the pot she has under the running water in the kitchen sink.

"Remember to rinse it until the water runs very, very clear."

I nod, stifling the impulse to say that many vitamins have also been washed away with the rinsing.

This is my grandmother's recipe.

"You don't cook a lot, do you?" she asks as she puts the pot inside the electric rice cooker.

"No, but when I do make rice, I want to make it like you do."

From her lips I don't hear the questions others might ask: "But, professor that you are, you haven't learned this after so many other times?" Or "If you like this rice so much, how come you still haven't made it in thirty years?"

She enjoys my company and I hers.

We sit to wait for the rice to cook.

"Tell me what's going on with you, Mima Otra. What's new with you?"

"Ay, mi nieta..." begins a long conversation of a thousand and one worries, a thousand and one joys, a thousand and one memories.

Now it is I who encourage and support, I who celebrate her life of ninety-three years. I want to fill myself with her.

After a while, I remind her that the rice is cooked, and, with difficulty, she gets up from the kitchen table. I hand her the cane bought in the last few months.

"My God," she scolds me with a smile. "I don't need it to take three steps."

"With the problem you're having with your ankle, it's a good idea to get used to using it."

To please me, she takes the cane. I know it will collect dust after I leave.

"And now a little lard..."

I sigh, praying that I have my grandmother's cholesterol genes.

"This gives it saborcito."

"How delicious, Mima Otra!"

"I still make pretty good rice, don't you think?" she smiles softly.

"The best in the world!"

And between laughter and conversation, in her small kitchen bathed in the light of morning, I ask God to give me the opportunity to learn to make white rice with lard another time, another day, with my grandmother.

Consortium

Jan Blucas

To all of you:

You consortium, you syndicate
Yours is a most hopeless endeavor
I'm reporting this to indicate
Your time is up, give up, forever.

Humans can't handle three ideas –
Science, religion, and politics
yet these are most important to us
Last to first, here are the semantics:

Now I'll ground you with the specifics:
You kill time, bellowing socialists
Shit's still boiling in the Pacific
Due to you big-blown capitalists

Your churches besmirch the merchandise
Apologize for guise built on lies
Promising an unclear paradise
It's hopeless, when do you realize?

The human race has come much too far
And in much too short a time to learn
The result is remarkably sub-par;
Your biggest achievement: the world-burn

Unity, always a rarity,
Sure as hell won't be possible now
It's parody, this disparity,
Your dumb stare of fat consumer cow

For all your advanced technologies
For all the values that you live by
For all your quaint philosophies
You must know when to give up and die

But I'm also weak, I'm not above
Sometimes, I still find myself concerned
With real-life matters, like things or love
An inhibition I've wrongly learned

Unfortunately, humanly yours,

The Resigned One

Myself Talking To My Dear Cat, Lady

Tricia Mucklow

Oh, hello, Lady.
I meant to tell you earlier this morning,
Thanks for the dead mouse sitting
at my bedroom door.

That was very thoughtful of you.
Oh, yes, I know that you love me.
There, there, my little sugar dumpling.
Give Mama a kiss, sweet pea.

But listen, darling, Mama doesn't
want anymore of those surprises.
Do you understand, snookums?
Now, what kind of breakfast would you like?

What do we have here?
There's Sardine Surprise, Salvacious Salmon,
and Snappy Salami.
Oh, all right, cutie pie, whatever my angel wants. There you go.

Oh, okay, you want to go outside for bird watching, baby doll?
There you go.
You want to sit on top of my Mother's birdcage?
Oh, all right, honey.
But please don't eat the little birdies, buttercup.

The Clark Family in Los Angeles

John Spencer

Announcer: Live from Los Angeles it's the Clark Family. Starring the Clark Family. The Father: Winston Clark. The Mother: Virginia Clark. The Son: Kent Clark. The Daughter: Misty Clark. And, of course, Crazy Uncle Merrit. When a family from a small Wisconsin farm moves to sun-filled L.A., anything can happen.

[*Musical interlude*]

Announcer: Brought to you by cigarettes. Buy cigarettes and smoke them everywhere. This is not a request. Now look who just got home from work.

[*Door closes*]

Winston: Hi, Darling, I'm home.

Virginia: Honey, I'm so thrilled to see you. Let me get your coat.

Winston: That's too kind. However, you can get me a cool, refreshing cigarette.

Virginia: Your favorite brand?

Winston: I wouldn't smoke anything else.

Virginia: So what did you do at work today?

Winston: (laughing) Oh, Dear, you shouldn't worry your pretty little head over what I do all day.

Virginia: Winston, I told you not to belittle me in front of Uncle Merrit.

Winston: Where's Uncle Merrit?

Merrit: Here I am.

Winston: Uncle Merrit, why are you walking around with an open umbrella?

Merrit: Because I'm fucking crazy. Why else would somebody do a thing like this?

Virginia: Well the announcer did announce him as Crazy Uncle Merrit.

Winston: That announcer sure is a smart guy.

Announcer: That's right. I get to see the script beforehand.

Merrit: So I'm not the only one who hears voices?

Winston: Oh, Uncle Merrit! Get in the basement, you're not funny.

Announcer: Do you care about your health? Of course, you do. That's why you smoke. Smoking makes your lungs healthier.

Girl: That must be why I breathe so heavily.

Announcer: That's right. We asked Olympic Gold Medallist Jesse Owens why he's a three-pack-a-day man.

Jesse: I smoke cigarettes, so I can run faster and run longer. If it weren't for cigarettes, I don't know if I would have beaten the Nazis.

Announcer: Thanks, Jesse.

Jesse: No, thank cigarettes.

Announcer: Now, back to the Clark family.

Virginia: Winston, would you call Kent for dinner?

Winston: Sure. (footsteps, door opening)

Kent: Dad, don't you knock?

Winston: Kent? What are you doing?

Kent: I'm, aahhh, getting changed for dinner...

Winston: Well okay, put you pants on and come to dinner. Wait, what's this magazine? (flipping noise) "Jim's body was dark and muscular..." Son, I don't want you reading anything like this again. I'll keep this for safe keeping.

Announcer: Later, at the dinner table...

Winston: ...and then my boss goes to me, (laughing) "Hey, Clark, you're fired."

Virginia: Oh, Winston, you tell the best stories!

Winston: That's nothing compared to what he did to me in the bathroom.

Virginia: Misty dear, don't you think that you father's story is the funniest thing you've ever heard?

Misty: It was funny, I guess.

Virginia: You've been very quiet tonight. Is there something on your mind?

Misty: Well, there is this one thing. You see Jimmy left me the other day.

Virginia: Why did he do a thing like that?

Misty: Because I told him I was pregnant with his child.

Kent: Kool.

Misty: I don't know what to do!

Winston: That's all right, pumpkin. Merrit can perform an abortion for you. Isn't that right, Merrit?

Merrit: On a human? I guess so. Sure, but I should probably wash my hands first.

[*They all laugh*]

Winston: Go to your room, son.

Virginia: Are we all finished with dinner? Good, I'll make everybody a martini.

[*Sound of cigarette lighter*]

Winston: Here you go, Misty.

Misty: Why did you give me two cigarettes?

Winston: Because now you're smoking for two.

Misty: (giggling) Not for long.

Merrit: How about some smokes down this way?

Misty: Why does Uncle Merrit get six cigarettes?

Merrit: Because I'm smoking for six.

Virginia: It's martini time!

Misty: Do I get two martinis now that I'm drinking for two?

Virginia: That's right.

Misty: No, Uncle Merrit gets six because he's drinking for six?

Virginia: And, Uncle Merrit is just a raging alcoholic.

[*Clinking of glass and slurping*]

Winston: Is Kent still in his room?

Virginia: No, he went out to the garage while I was in the kitchen.

Winston: Well, I'm going to check up on him. Excuse me.

[*Chair movement, doors opening, footsteps, another door opening*]

Winston: Hey, son, what are you up to?

Kent: (coughing) I'm (coughing) just smoking a cigarette.

Winston: Oh, that's good. Wait a second, that's not a regular cigarette. That's one of those new Marijuana cigarettes, isn't it?

Kent: (giggling) Yes. (cough)

Winston: Well, there's nothing funny about The Marijuana, son. Give me that. I'm going to tell you a story. A story of failure, mental illness, and The Marijuana. Stop staring at your shoes!

Kent: I've got shoes.

Winston: Yes, I know.

Kent: I've got shoes.

Winston: You know, Crazy Uncle Merrit didn't always used to be Crazy Uncle Merrit. In fact, he used to be a very wealthy, well-respected member of the cat show judging circuit. That is until he found The Marijuana. Merrit used to be a great man. Now he's hiding from the authorities for unspeakable crimes to animals.

Kent: Because of the class of drug it is?

Winston: No, because it dopes your brain. Like a transistor is doped. It clouds your brain and gives you Communist thoughts.

Kent: Gee, Dad, thanks. I learned a lot today.

Winston: That's right. Now don't let me catch you smoking The Marijuana or reading those Communist books by Marx, Lenin, and Dostoevsky.

Kent: Okay. I love you, Dad.

Winston: No, son, you love your mother. You'll respect me.

[*Exit music*]

Announcer: Next week on "The Clark Family in Los Angeles," Crazy Uncle Merrit is put in a asylum and The Clark Family has to break him out. So stock up on your cigarettes, and we'll see you next week!

The Common Opera

Becca Smith

Silently slithering around emerald hills,
Gray swirls bring morning greetings,
Pit-pat, rat-a-tat. Songs of nature's will
Are operas of life and beauty meeting.

Gray swirls bring morning greetings,
As diesel engines begin to hum—
The operas of life and beauty meeting.
Thunder's mallet strikes the drum.

As diesel engines begin to hum,
People hustle, pulsing and beating.
Thunder's mallet strikes the drum.
This short-lived dance is wild and fleeting.

People hustle, pulsing and beating,
Singing curses and thanks to the rain.
This short-lived dance is wild and fleeting,
The conductor, alone, to thank or blame.

Singing curses and thanks to the rain,
The opera's movement begins to slow.
The conductor alone to thank or blame,
For tomorrow becomes His next great show.

The opera's movement begins to slow.
Gray swirls just memories of greetings.
Tomorrow will bring the next great show.
Those operas of life and beauty meeting.

To Mr. Car Salesman

Joe Hassert

Mr. Car Salesman,
it's still running smoothly.
I thank you for that.
You sold me a wonderful piece of machinery.
Beautiful black,
the latest design,
I couldn't be happier.
It has no quirks.
I love the power steering.

But,
I want my rusty blue beater back.
I miss it.
Its fallouts...
The weekends lying side
by side with my father
fixing her...

The only thing wrong with
the one you sold me is
there's nothing wrong.
I'd like to trade it back

Dark-Green '66 Plymouth

Bill Yarrow

I drove to you in April
in a dark-green '66 Plymouth
and you loved me all through Illinois
and its strange cities and feel.

You claimed to be blind
until you held the wheel at midnight
and plied the side road from St. Louis
in my dark-green '66 Plymouth.

I think we were married after that
and parked by the lake time bore witness
to the cold sun on green vinyl which was
the dark-green '66 Plymouth.

A screwdriver in the carburetor, a hole
in the gas tank, the left front fender
destroyed. These are the Chicago wounds
of the dark-green '66 Plymouth.

My father spoke to us the day he died.
Driving toward his death we heard him
in the wind which wrenched the wiper
from our dark-green car.

Entering New York, we lost the radio
and for 4 years drove in each other's
voice. That was the true sound
of the dark-green '66 Plymouth.

It was the worst day of my life
when our tiny daughter came to life
and your blood in strips froze to the seat
of the dark-green '66 Plymouth.

They stole our battery three times,
the bastards, three times,
and on the third time they killed it,
the dark-green '66 Plymouth.

We just ran away into Ohio
and turned our backs on roads
driven by the memory of a Plymouth
two-door, dark-green, '66.

The Tale Of Money Market And IPO

Brenda McCracken

Wall Street: *Ding, ding, ding*...The market is now open for trade.

Financial Analyst: The current economic expansion ties the record 106-month expansion of the 1960's and will surpass it next month. Spending by consumers is the major catalyst behind the current economic boom, making up about two-thirds of the nation's overall economic activity. The expanding global economy and our robust job market suggest that consumer optimism and spending could rise even further in coming months.

Investor: Money Market, Money Market,
How do you grow?

Wails of newborn. Waah, Waah, Waah...

Obstetrician: Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Opinheimer, it's a healthy baby boy! Dad, would you like to do the honors of cutting the cord?

Phoenix: Well...sure, Doc.

Sarah: He's so beautiful!

Phoenix: Maybe after he's cleaned up a bit.

Nurse: I'll take care of that. Your baby boy will look like a million tax-free dollars!

Sounds of gentle water splashing punctuated by cries of terror.

Sarah: We have to give him a name.

Phoenix: How about Ivon Phoenix Opinheimer for Initial Public Offering? After all, he is our start-up-investment!

Sarah: I don't know...his initials will be IPO.

Phoenix: It might just be the edge he needs to succeed in this crazy upstart world of ours!

****

Wall Street: *Tickety, tickety, tickety...*

Financial Analyst: Next week, the Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates a quarter-percentage point in its latest move to slow the economy's growth and head off inflation. The Fed has kept interest rates quite high relative to prevailing inflation because it believes that by the time inflation becomes evident, it will require horribly painful measures to keep it from spiraling our of control.

Investor: Money Market, Money Market,
Raise your points slow.

Sound of child giggling and playing with toy cash register...

Phoenix: Look at little IPO playing with his cash register! He's grown as fast as the economy!

Sarah: We have to take him to get his vaccinations today.

Phoenix: Little does he know he's about to get shot. Ignorance is bliss.

Sarah: You should read the list of complications that can arise from those shots!

Phoenix: They say prevention's worth a pound of cure.

Sarah: But he'll probably never get any of those diseases.

Phoenix: I'd rather take my chances with the vaccination and head off polio or mumps.

****

Rooaarr of bear...

Financial Analyst: Rising interest rates have catapulted the economy into a bear market. Market averages are pitching wildly as rising interest rates have convinced many investors that corporate profits will be pinched later this year. The Nasdaq Composite Index saw its fourth-largest point drop ever on record. Tech companies are viewed as especially vulnerable to rising interest rates because they attract investors by promising strong earnings growth in the future. In one horrific trading session, angry investors slashed millions off the market cap.

Investor: Money Market, Money Market,
Please don't slide.

Coughing and hacking...

IPO: Mom, wake up.

Sarah: What?

IPO: I don't feel good.

Sarah: What's wrong?

IPO: I can't stop coughing.

Phoenix: You look lower than the Nasdaq!

IPO: I'm fine, Dad. Just give me some cough medicine.

Sarah: I think we need to take you to the Emergency Room.

Phoenix: He'll be fine. He just has a cold.

Sarah: But he looks like he's going to drop!

Phoenix: Don't get the jitters, dear. He's born of good stock. He'll recover soon.

****

Wall Street: *Ding, Ding, Ding...Tickety, Tickety, Tickety...*

Investment Strategist: We're seeing a more commonsense approach to the market. Some of the big names are down, but investors are doing some good analysis and stock picking. Investors looking to minimize risk and maximize profits must take advantage of dollar cost averaging, diversify their investments, and keep their portfolio balanced. Look for stocks with long-term growth potential, look for companies whose earnings are likely to exceed expectations, and look for tax-smart advantages.

Investor: Money Market, Money Market,
Turn the tide.

IPO runs into the house and the door slams behind him.

IPO: Maaaahhhmmm!!!

Sarah: I'm in the kitchen!

IPO: Guess what! I signed up for wrestling at school today! Isn't that great?

Sarah: I don't think that's such a good idea. There's too much risk involved!

IPO: Ah, Mom, I'll be fine.

Phoenix: Do you really think that's a wise investment of your time, son?

IPO: Sure, Dad, colleges actually grant scholarships to the best wrestlers!

Sarah: Broken noses and collar bones, dislocated shoulders, bruised kidneys–that's enough risk to spook any investor!

IPO: Mom, I know I'll be good at this. I won't get hurt!

Phoenix: It sounds like you've evaluated the risks and know how to minimize them.

Sarah: It's still too risky!

Phoenix: He's old enough to decide what risks he's willing to take. Don't get the jitters, dear. IPO's grown into a wise investor.

****

Wall Street: *Tickety, tickety, tickety...*

Financial Reporter: The Standard & Poor's 500 produced highly positive returns–averaging 20% over the last six months and 27% over that last twelve. U.S. stocks fought off interest-rate jitters to close higher. Broader stock indicators also bounced back from major losses to finish higher. Optimism for strong technology profits lifted shares in the technology sector.

Investor: Money Market, Money Market,
Tried and true.

Graduation March playing in background.

Sarah: I can't believe IPO is leaving for college.

Phoenix: On a wrestling scholarship no less!

Sarah: What a long shot!

Phoenix: Who would have expected that return on our investment?

Sarah: Yes, it did produce highly positive returns with no broken bones at all!

****

Snorting of bull. Toro, Toro...Andale, Andale...

Financial Analyst: Low inflation and rising profits are two ingredients feeding this bull market. Every projection of the next quarter's growth has been widely underestimated for the past year. How long can this boom continue?

Investor: Money Market, Money Market,
I love you.

Wails of newborn. Waah, Waah, Waah...

Phoenix: That's my strong little grandbaby!

Sarah: She's so beautiful!

Phoenix: As good looking as a million tax-free dollars!

Sarah: What will you name her?

IPO: Dolares Opinheimer-Wahl.

Sarah: Her initials will be DOW.

Phoenix: Sounds like you've already made a wise investment in her future.

IPO: Don't worry Dad. We'll make sure our little start-up grows happily rich ever after.

Wall Street: *The market is now closed...*

The Foreigner (L' Étrangère)

Fatima Bellahcène
Translated from the French by Ibrahim Atac

You say I am changed
Like all the others
I betrayed myself.
No, I did not change
I only learned to talk.
You thought that I was an open book,
A book of blank pages,
Because I was silent,
Because I kept hidden behind my silence.

The Flanagan Letters

Anthony Heintzelman

Dear Ms. Streisand,

For years I have been one of your biggest fans. I never wrote to you before because I never knew what to say and because I rarely had any spare time. Time is no longer a concern for me, so I decided to write you. I have loved you ever since I saw *Funny Girl* as a teenager. Since then, I have seen all of your films and purchased all of your albums. One of my dreams is to see you perform live, but I'm not so sure if that is possible at this time, due to circumstances beyond my control. I have to go now, but I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Tommy Flanagan

Dear Mr. Flanagan,

Thank you for the letter. Unfortunately, Barbra is unable to respond personally to all of the mail she gets, but she loves to hear from her fans. Enclosed is a signed photograph. Thank you for writing.

Dear Ms. Streisand,

Thanks for sending the picture. I hung it above my bed so that you are the last thing I see at night. So, Barbra, what have you been up to lately? You don't mind if I call you Barbra, do you? I figure since we have already corresponded with each other once, it would be fine to call you Barbra. You can call me Tommy if you would like. Well, I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,
Tommy Flanagan

Dear Mr. Flanagan,

Thank you for your letter. Barbra has been very busy lately and is unable to respond to all of the letter she receives. She has been hard at work on her next album, which should be released some time next spring. Again, thank you for writing, and Barbra hopes to hear from you again in the future.

Dear Barbra,

I just received your letter and was so excited to hear that you have a new album coming out that I had to write you back immediately. I also wanted to write to let you know the whole truth. When I said that I was no longer concerned with time, what I meant is that I am currently in prison. But maybe you figured that out when you saw my address. I'm sure you did, and since you wrote back anyway, it must not be that big of a problem. Is there any way you could perform here sometime? I know that you have a very busy schedule, but it would mean so much to me.

Sincerely,
Tommy Flanagan

Dear Mr. Flanagan,

Thank you for your recent letter. Barbra is very busy and has no opening in her schedule at this time for any additional performances, but she will keep your request in mind if she does decide to play some more dates.

Dear Barbra,

I have finally decided to ask you what I have wanted to all along. Will you marry me? Due to the circumstances of my situation, we would never be able to have any physical contact, or talk to each other unsupervised, but our love doesn't need any of those things. Please respond quickly.

Sincerely,
Tommy Flanagan

Dear Mr. Flanagan,

Barbra has been very busy lately and has not heard your proposal. As soon as she has time, she will be informed, although the chances of her giving a positive response seem rather slim, due to the fact that she is currently married, quite happily. Enclosed is some information on Barbra's official fan club.

The Lure

Colleen Robbins

Derek pulled himself out of the water and staggered up the rocky beach. The cold wind howled, numbing him. He focused his eyes on a thick knot of bushes up the beach, pointed his body toward them, and let his mind slip back to yesterday.

The weather had been sunny; the sea had been calm. It was perfect weather for sailing. Derek had been planning to sail between St. Croix and Bermuda for years, but something always came up to change his plans. This time it was the girl in the long red skirt.

She seemed so alone, sitting at the end of the little bar in Christiansted. One pale face in a sea of darkness, he thought. Derek was enchanted at his first sight of her. He'd been smooth, talking with her and observing all the customs, at least long enough to lure her to his hotel room.

She'd gone willingly enough, and she stood in the door scanning the room with an intensity that surprised him. Her eyes stopped on the little frame sitting on his nightstand.

"Oh, a sailboat!" she cried out in a voice that reminded him of seagulls squawking. Her voice dropped to a murmur. "Is it yours?"

"Thirty-six foot Pearson, and her inboard motors are powerful enough for waterskiing. I named her *Mystique*." Derek warmed to the topic of his boat and spent the better part of an hour telling his fascinated guest about his travels. Realizing suddenly that he was wasting time, he tried to steer the conversation back to the girl. "So why were you alone in the bar?" Oh, wonderful, thought Derek. Let's be blunt, he chastised himself.

"My life is boring. I thought if I sat there long enough, some wonderful adventure would find its way to me." She cocked her head to one side and stared at him with wonderfully large green eyes. "And I think it has." She smiled at him, and Derek was enchanted again.

"Would you like to go sailing with me? I've got the boat all stocked and ready to go. We'll make our own adventure." Derek licked his lips with anticipation.

The girl laughed, her voice ebbing and flowing like waves crashing on the rocks. Derek thought an undercurrent of bitterness tinged the sound, but it was washed away by the sound of sheer joy in the next wave of laughter. Without

speaking, they gathered the few things he had stored in the hotel room, left the key on the bureau, and slipped away to the marina. In less than an hour, they were underway.

Derek checked his charts and headed for the open ocean. He was just out of sight of land when the squall hit. It blew up out of a clear sky, or maybe he was too involved thinking about his plans for the girl. The wind was suddenly lashing at his sails. Derek was distracted from his thoughts by the thousand duties necessary to keep the *Mystique* from swamping.

The winds increased, howling past his ears, singing through the rigging as his sails tore to shreds. He fought to see through the driving rain, worried that the storm might drive him too close to the myriad islands. The winds gusted from the side, surprising him, and he felt a grinding vibration through the hull of the boat as she landed on something solid. Waves broke over the side, pushing the *Mystique* further onto the obstruction. The mast broke with a sharp crack, knocking Derek over the side of the boat and into the waiting arms of the sea. He grabbed for his lifejacket and watched it swirl on past, washing further from his reach with each wave that hurried by.

Derek stopped suddenly as he walked into the knot of bushes. He shivered again and boldly pushed through the greenery. A moment later he was looking down the far side of the tiny island at the waves crashing on the further shore. He heard the girl's laugh. He realized he'd forgotten to ask her name or even think about her in the midst of the storm. He turned to follow the sound.

The bright red of her skirt rolling in the waves at the water's edge caught his eye, just as the girl had when they first met. She laughed again, and he raised his eyes, tracking the sand until he saw movement. The girl laughed and played in the water beyond with her sister mermaids, their scaly legs as green as their eyes, leaping like dolphins in the rolling surf.

Reel World

Ted Thompson

In the movie
of my mind
it is always,
as the snowcapped
signs all say,
"Cool inside."
Usher's bobbing flashlight,
newsreels from the Ganges,
Heckle and Jeckle
fool the farmer.
I taste Jujubes
through salty lips,
smell popcorn
and wet hair,
hear rain on the roof
over the dialogue.
In the glow
up there
at the end of darkness,
Thelma Ritter

banters
with Charlie Ruggles
while Gloria Grahame
in her Edith Head frock
coolly assesses
Jeff Chandler
and Frank Lovejoy
striking angular
poses.
She latches on to
Chandler.
Lovejoy never had a chance.
Dimitri Tiomkin's score,
in violin crescendos,
swells
to coda.
"The End"
fades to black.
We stumble up the aisle
onto wet sidewalks
where we practice
movie swaggers
under the streetlights
of a dull, dull town.

Love

Shelby Rakes

Love is like a raging wild fire.
Without warning it can sweep
into your life and change
everything. Sometimes it's
swift and sweet, leaving you
rejuvenated, like the earth after
a short brush fire. Other
times it totally devastates
your life, like an out of control
dry season fire, by being
unreturned love. The best
times of love are when a
person falls truly in love.
These inner flames burn
like the eternal fires of Hell.
Every time you look into
your loved ones' eyes
you will see the relentless
white, orange and blue flames
burning deep inside of
their passionate souls,
consuming their
hearts. Like a lightning
strike, love can come
and go. How wonderful
love is at its most glorious
peak, but how horrendous
it is at its worst. No one
can avoid love forever
because it burns inside
all of us with relentless
passion.

Wordeater is the biannual literary/arts magazine of Joliet Junior College.

It accepts submissions from current and former students and faculty.

It is looking for original creative work of any kind, including poetry, plays, short fiction, translations, personal or literary essays, interviews, autobiographical prose, photography, and art.

Please submit work to W. Yarrow (English/Foreigh Language Department, mailbox C-1050). Put your name, address, and telephone number on an envelope or separate cover, but not on the work itself. Only artwork/photography will be returned. Please include a SASE.

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Judge for the John Stobart* Awards, Issue No. 108

Ted Thompson

Design and Layout

Jo Stworzyjanek

1st and 2nd place monetary awards for prose, poetry, and artwork are given for student work judged the best in the current issue by an outside judge.

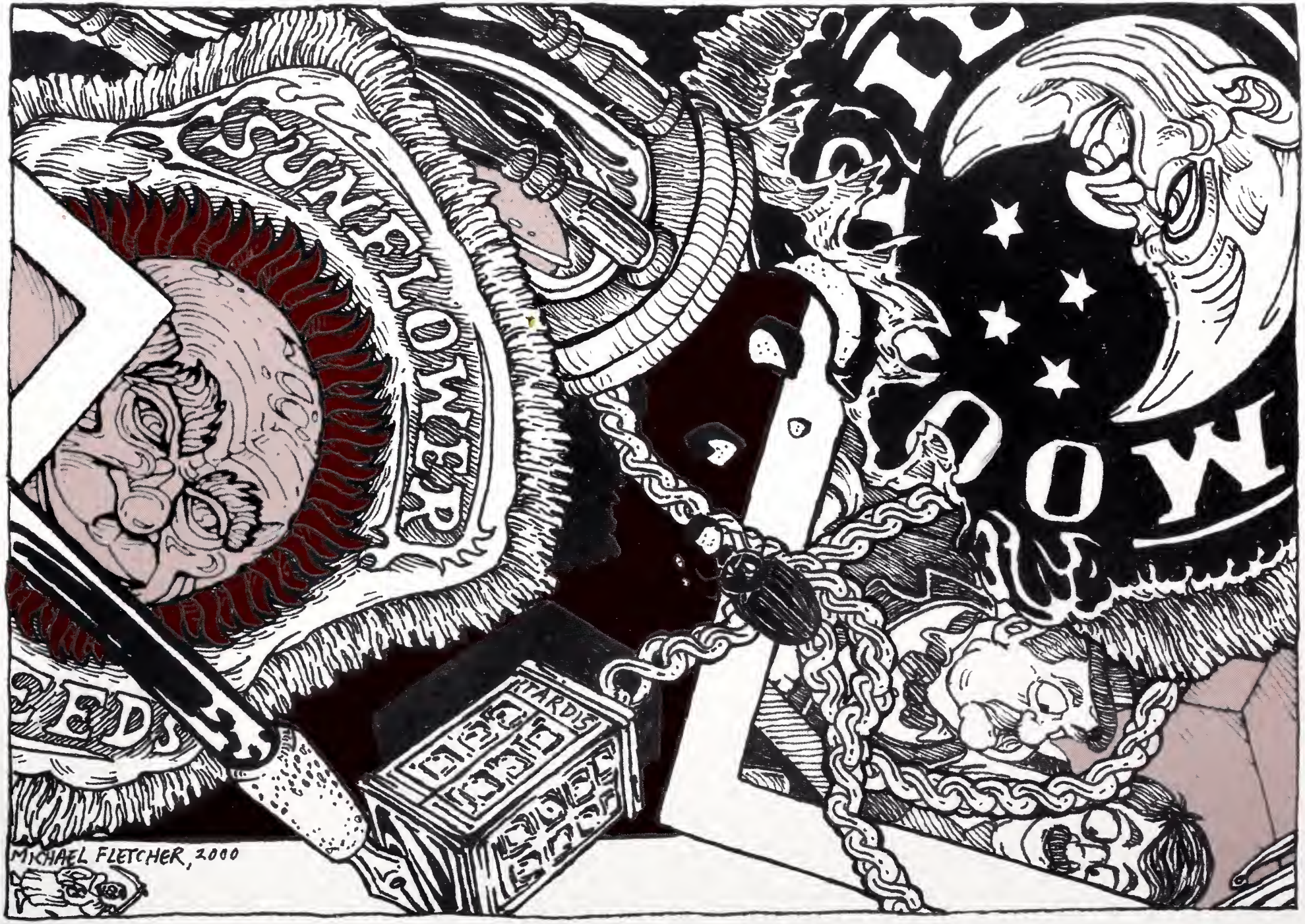
Issue No. 108

The John Stobart Award for Prose
1st Place: Brenda McCracken for "The Tale of Money Market and IPO"
2nd Place: Colleen Robbins for "The Lure"

The John Stobart Award for Poetry
1st Place: Becca Smith for "The Common Opera"
2nd Place: Marissa Frattini for "Baggage"

The John Stobart Award for Visual Arts
1st Place: Michael Fletcher for front cover
2nd Place: Michael Fletcher for back cover

*John Stobart was the founder and guiding light of **Wordeater**. As faculty sponsor, he shepherded it through 106 issues. He retired from Joliet Junior College's English/Foreign Language Department in 1999.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